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ABSTRACT

In order to determine what characteristics are most important in prompting Mississippi's major educational consumers to hire teachers, an opinionnaire was developed and sent to a stratified random sample of elementary, junior high, and senior high principals, and to superintendents. The questionnaire consisted of 11 factors to be ranked according to their priorities by the school administrators who were concerned with hiring teachers for their first teaching position. There was high agreement between the groups. Effective use of written and oral English was ranked first by three groups. Personal appearance was ranked second by superintendents and senior high principals, and third by the other principals. The principals placed slightly more confidence in the evaluation of the public school supervisor than did the superintendents, who felt that students' grade point average were more indicative of future teaching performance. This survey suggests that those seeking positions in Mississippi will not be judged first by their academic records and recommendations but rather by the way they write in initial contacts by letter, the manner in which they complete their application forms, and the impression they leave in interviews. Several suggestions for incorporating these results in teacher preparation programs are presented. (Author/IRT)

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A SURVEY OF OPINIONS OF MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING FACTORS CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT IN HIRING TEACHERS FOR THEIR FIRST TEACHING POSITION

by

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The competition for available jobs will become increasingly keener if the projections now being made materialize. Between now and 1985, colleges are expected to produce 800,000 more graduates than there will be jobs.[5] Although there is expected to be some stability in the late 1970's, the trend in the 1980's will be one of increasing instability with respect to positions available in many fields.[9] Projections of this nature have sometimes been inaccurate; however, there seem to be reliable indicators that this trend of oversupply will continue in the forseeable future.[2] This present oversupply of teachers and the projected shrinkage of enrollments in the elementary and secondary schools[1,4] will, unfortunately, add many more to the growing list of unemployed or underemployed.[3]

The implications that these trends in the near future have for colleges and universities which train teachers are obvious. With fewer and fewer jobs available in the field of education, those colleges and universities which produce teachers who are being placed in teaching positions will certainly continue to attract students, while institutions which do not may see their student populations dwindle. Students in education are faced with the problem of entering a profession which may not provide them with teaching positions; in addition, they are faced with an ever-increasing cost of attending college. Tuition alone is expected to rise by eight to twelve percent by the fall of 1975.[7] This dilemma will force teacher-training institutions to place more emphasis on recruiting activities and

on producing graduates who will be hired. Those institutions which cannot place their graduates will face close scrutiny by prospective students. These present and projected conditions prompted this study. It was also prompted by the fact that most recent graduates of teacher training programs are faced with the problem of seeking positions for which they have little experience other than a few short weeks of student teaching and by the need to produce some guidelines which may be helpful to the job-hunting student.

METHOD

In order to determine what characteristics are most important in prompting Mississippi's major educational consumers to hire teachers, an opinionnaire was developed. In March of 1975, four hundred of these opinionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of elementary school principals, junior high principals, senior high principals, and superintendents of education in Mississippi. The opinonnaire consisted of eleven factors to be ranked according to their priorities, by the school administrators who were concerned with hiring teachers for their first teaching position. These eleven factors were:

A. Accumulative grade point average
B. Grade point average in major area
C. Personal appearance (neat, clean, exhibits good taste in dress)
D. Effective use of oral and written English
E. Evaluation of student teaching performance by public school supervisor
F. Evaluation of student teaching performance by college supervisor
G. Evaluation by college instructors in major subject areas
H. Evaluation by college instructors in professional education courses
I. Race (with respect to keeping specific racial balance)

J. Environment in which the applicant was reared (rural, urban, low income, middle class, etc.)
K. Scores on the National Teachers Examination

The educators were also asked to add other factors which they felt should be included and to rank them on the same basis used for the original list. Since they did not add any other factors to the original list, it appears that they considered the list adequately inclusive; therefore the average rank for each factor on that list was tabulated, and each was given a rank of 1-11, one being the highest priority.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the 183 returned opinionnaires (46%)* indicates that effective use of written and oral English was ranked number 1 by three of the groups, the exception being the junior high principals who ranked it in a tie for first place with evaluation of student teaching performance by the public school supervisor. (See Table 1) Personal appearance was ranked second by superintendents and senior high principals, and third by elementary and junior high principals. Elementary and junior high principals ranked evaluation of student teaching performance by public school supervisors before personal appearance. The principals placed slightly more confidence in the evaluation of the public school supervisor than did the superintendents, who felt that students' grade point averages in their major areas and cumulative grade point averages were more indicative of their future teaching performance. These first four rankings by the superintendents were supported by one superintendent who commented, "I do not like to rank these (factors) because I think they are all important, but

*Therefore, the author makes no claim that the results are representative or unbiased.

TABLE I

Ranking of Eleven Factors to be Considered in Hiring a Teacher for their First Teaching Position by Elementary School Principals, Junior High School Principals, Senior High School Principals and School Superintendents in the State of Mississippi, Spring, 1975

FACTORS:	(n=79) Elementary Principals Ave* Rank	** Rank	(n=24) Jr. High Principals Ave* Rank	** Rank	(n=57) Sr. High Principals Ave* Rank	** Rank	(n=23) Superintendents Ave* Rank	** Rank
A. Accumulative grade point average	5.905	6	5.051	6	5.745	6	4.847	4
B. Grade point average in major area	5.265	5	4.645	4	4.754	4	3.934	3
C. Personal Appearance (neat, clean exhibits good taste in dress)	4.012	3	3.854	3	3.807	2	3.043	2
D. Effective use of oral and written English	2.746	1	3.000	2	2.508	1	2.500	1
E. Evaluation of student teaching performance by public school supervisor	3.588	2	2.979	1	3.921	3	4.981	5
F. Evaluation of student teaching performance by college supervisor	4.962	4	4.791	5	5.517	5	6.304	6
G. Evaluation by college instructors in major subject areas	6.664	7	6.083	7	6.131	7	7.086	7
H. Evaluation by college instructors in professional education courses	6.689	8	7.833	9	7.131	8	7.369	8
I. Race (with respect to keeping specific racial balance)	9.158	11	9.479	11	9.438	10	8.282	10
J. Environment in which the applicant was reared (rural, urban, low income, middle, etc.)	9.031	10	9.208	10	10.157	11	9.478	11
K. Score on National Teachers Exam	8.835	9	8.791	8	8.324	9	8.000	9

*The average rank given on an eleven point scale by all who responded within that group.
**The rank order of each factor as seen by the total group.

I personally eliminate candidates on poor performance in 1, 2, and 3 (use of English, appearance, grade point average in major area) quicker than any other area. If a person is not neat and does not use good English, and does not know the subject, he is no good to you." The importance of all factors was again emphasized when another respondent commented, "If the person is superior on all other factors except personal appearance, and is filthy, I will not hire him."

In an analysis of the overall result, there is very high agreement between the groups. The only real area of disagreement, and this is slight, is that principals seem to place evaluation of student teaching performance higher than academic grade point average; whereas, superintendents place a higher priority on grade point average. In the other areas of concern, little difference in rank existed. Evaluation by college instructors ranked either eighth or ninth. National Teacher Examination scores, environmental background, and race were given the lowest rankings. Several respondents commented that race was a factor that must be considered because of court orders; however, another principal responded that due to the number of blacks and whites applying for positions, the other factors were the determinants regardless of the court orders.

This survey then suggests to the elementary and secondary education majors who will be seeking positions in Mississippi that they will be judged, not first by their academic records and recommendations of their colleges faculty but rather by the way they write in initial contacts by letter, the manner in which they complete their application forms, and the impression they leave with respect to their personal appearance and spoken English in job interviews. The latter factors will, to a greater

extent, determine whether or not they are successful in obtaining that much sought after first teaching position.

To colleges and universities producing teachers, this survey suggests that institutions of higher learning must insist that the basic college program in communicative skills teach students how to express themselves properly in written and oral English. This task is becoming more and more difficult as major colleges and universities across the country are faced with large percentages of freshmen classes that cannot pass entrance examinations in English and whose writing skills are limited.[6] In addition, the number of persons who score high on the verbal part of the Scholastic Aptitude Test administered by the College Entrance Examination Board is declining.[8]

To meet this demand for teachers who are competent in communicative skills, colleges and universities will again be faced with that perennial decision of whether to grant a college degree after moving an individual along the academic continuum for four years, regardless of his or her academic level as a freshman, or to grant a college degree after the student has reached a specific level of competence, regardless of the time involved.

The writer would like to offer a few possible solutions to this seemingly growing problem:

1. Return to requiring non-credit course in the subject areas where members of the freshman class are not equipped to deal academically with college or university level course work. (The university and college system of California is presently considering recinding a 1964 ruling which eliminated remedial work at the college level.)[6]

2. Divide all combined literature and composition courses at the freshman level and create two distinct courses -- one course in composition and one course in literature -- in order to prevent literature from becoming the area where the

greatest emphasis is placed to the detriment of composition.

3. Conduct regular seminars through teacher training programs to keep students abreast of the latest information regarding hiring practices. Students need to know whether they will be judged on personal appearance, speech, etc. These seminars need to be held at various points over the four-year tenure of the student and not just as a parting "one-shot" attempt after student teaching.

4. Utilize those courses in the professional area to ascertain the competence of students in specific troublesome areas. Where there is obvious incompetence, students should then be requested to take additional training before they are granted degrees. It is time to start judging the product of education programs on specific competencies and not on grades alone.

5. Give another form of any proficiency test which a student fails, even if he has passed a course designed to eliminate the weaknesses revealed in the original test. A passing grade in the course does not mean that the student has acquired that mastery of the subject which was required to pass the initial test.

The time has come when educators in teacher training programs must start taking complete responsibility for their product. No longer will they be able to transfer responsibility for student incompetence to the various academic areas. Since the teacher training program is the area of professional training and certification, the directors must devise ways to verify the competence of each student and, where there is evidence of incompetence, the student should either be sent back to the specific academic areas for further training or the institution should set up the mechanism for training within the education area. In either case, some vehicle must be developed to insure, in as far as possible, that each institution which trains prospective teachers can control the quality of its product.

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